

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 217824
ORIGIN ARA-14

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P 281158Z AUG 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELTN, PN

SUBJECT:DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY

1. IN A MEETING WITH FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION (FHWA) AND AGRICULTURE OFFICIALS CHAIRED BY DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARELLANO, WE CONSIDERED PROSPECTS FOR THE DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY IN PANAMA AND COLOMBIA FOLLOWING CONGRESSIONAL ACTION ELIMINATING FURTHER FUNDING THROUGH FY 1979. IT WAS GENERALLY AGREED THAT RENEWED EFFORTS TO OBTAIN CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF FUNDS FOR CONTINUING WORK SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AFTER THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS, BUT THAT PROSPECTS WERE DIM. WITHOUT FURTHER FUNDING FHWA WOULD HAVE TO CLOSE ITS OFFICE IN COLOMBIA FAIRLY SOON, PROBABLY BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR, AND CLOSE DOWN ITS OPERATIONS
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IN PANAMA AND OFFICE IN THE CANAL ZONE IN ABOUT 12 MONTHS. FHWA HAS FUNDS TO COMPLETE THE PROJECT CURRENTLY UNDERWAY IN PANAMA SO THAT JOB LAYOFFS WILL COME GRADUALLY OVER THE NEXT YEAR AS THE PROJECT UNDER CONSTRUCTION IS COMPLETED.

2. IN REPLY TO A LETTER FROM THE ACTING MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS OF PANAMA, WALLACE FERGUSON, EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER

THE ACTION OF CONGRESS, THE ACTING ADMINISTRATOR OF FHWA
RESPONDED WITH GUIDELINES PANAMA MIGHT FOLLOW IN CONTINUING

ORK ON THE ROAD WITH ITS OWN FUNDS THAT WOULD ENHANCE THE
POSSIBILITY OF LATER REIMBURSEMENT FROM THE U.S. FOR ITS
TWO-THIRDS SHARE IF FUNDS SHOULD BE APPROPRIATED IN THE
FUTURE. FHWA GIVES ASSURANCES OF ITS INTENTION TO CON-
TINUE EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE PARTICIPATING FUNDS FOR THE
DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY PROGRAM. A COPY OF FERGUSON'S LETTER
AND THE FHWA REPLY HAVE BEEN POUCHED TO EMBASSY PANAMA.

3. WE ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL FOR
ADDITIONAL FUNDS WILL BE GRANTED EVEN IN FY 1980. PLEASE
DISCUSS WITH HOST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND REPORT THEIR
REACTION AND LIKELY LOCAL REPERCUSSIONS TO PHASEOUT OF
FHWA ACTIVITIES FOR LACK OF APPROPRIATIONS AS DESCRIBED
ABOVE. CHRISTOPHER

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